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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Local and state child protective services need reform

Sunday, April 01, 2007

BY JOAN M. DOUGHTY

The murder of Ricky Holland in Ingham County garnered a great deal of publicity and public outrage across our state. The child protective and foster care systems were held accountable. Investigations were launched and lawmakers held hearings. A report made public blamed flawed policies and implementation of existing policies. As a result, at least 13 state employees were transferred or fired. Department of Human Services (DHS) implemented new foster care policies and improved its training for Child Protective Services workers.

Young Ricky was front page news. Sadly, there are many similar cases that, for whatever reason, have not grabbed headlines.

We have our own trail of young bodies in Washtenaw County. Less than a year ago a little girl died, allegedly at the hands of her mother. This woman is charged with first-degree murder. Not long ago a Washtenaw County child died in her Wayne County foster home, and recently two severely abused babies were admitted to Mott Hospital, one of whom died. Two Washtenaw County contract workers were charged with failing to report that a child they placed in a foster home was raped at that home.

These cases combined did not garner close to the community attention allocated the Ricky Holland case in Ingham County. Yet early last year our county was rocked by horrifying stories of mutilated dogs and coyotes dumped by the side of the road. Almost every day another headline was devoted to these awful discoveries, with side stories delving into the psychology of someone who would do something so sick. There was conversation in every workplace, in every store, all over the county about these hideous acts. A local legislator introduced a bill proposing stiffer penalties for animal cruelty.

What accounts for the disproportionate measures of attention and outrage? Why has there been no community outcry, demanding that we better protect our children? Research - and common sense - tell us childhood abuse is correlated to future substance abuse, incarceration, homelessness and self-harm, yet our most vulnerable children are too often left unprotected and alone.

In several of the above cases, our local Child Protective Services received reports from concerned neighbors and service providers before disaster struck. Those of us who work with children and families are mandated to report any suspected child maltreatment we encounter among the families we serve. Yet too often when we report serious concerns about the safety of children, there is no follow-up. Too often even when a case is assigned for investigation, it is not substantiated after a cursory investigation. And in the rare instance a child is placed in foster care, things do not get better.

There are many reasons why the child protective system does not protect children.

- The name Child Protective Services is misleading. This department is not in the business of protecting children in general. By law, it only investigates abuse and neglect of children occurring at the hands of adult family members living with that child. Grandfather molesting his granddaughter when he visits? CPS will not take the report.

At minimum, our child protective system should investigate any maltreatment committed by a family member. And it should be the responsibility of the CPS hotline(s) to verify reports of abuse that don't fall within the CPS purview are addressed through other means.

- It may be surprising to learn our Michigan Child Protection Code does not include educational neglect. Yet it is widely recognized that educational neglect almost always masks serious dysfunction and/or abuse within a family. Families that cannot manage to send their children to school regularly are also lacking in the care of their children in many other ways.

- One of the most glaring gaps in Michigan CPS investigation procedures is the lack of mandatory collateral contacts, which are routine in most states. These include checking with teachers, social workers, doctors, public health nurses, church leaders, other family members and neighbors. Without that, the only information CPS workers have to base their assessments on is a report of concern and a parent's self-serving explanation. Abusive parents are often very adept at furnishing plausible sounding explanations.

Collateral contacts need to be mandatory for every CPS investigation in Michigan.

- Michigan should implement a centralized reporting and case tracking system as other states do. Such a system relieves local (county) DHS departments from having to staff 24-hour hotlines. Currently, each of Michigan's 83 counties has its own system, an inefficient and ineffective way of using resources.

A centralized reporting system allows for statewide tracking, allowing workers to track if this child or family was reported previously in another county. Some families move from county to county to avoid detection - a centralized intake system addresses this.

Finally, a centralized reporting system allows for easier and more accurate statewide data tracking. Opponents of centralized reporting purport that it reduces local control. This is untrue. Investigation, substantiating and case management still occur at the county level.

- As a result of the Ricky Holland case, Michigan has improved the training CPS investigators receive. This too should take place on a statewide basis. It is more economical and assures a quality education. Excellence in protecting children must become the norm.
- Michigan's DHS should embrace transparency and accountability. The publication of the Ricky Holland report was a good start. It should not stand alone. Some states mandate every DHS office to coordinate an annual forum inviting feedback on its programs and services. When the system fails, there should be public accountability - in every case. Every fatality should result in a public analysis like the Ricky Holland report. Confidentiality protects only an inept agency and parents with something to hide. It does nothing to protect children.

Many groups and individuals in this area - including professionals from the Ann Arbor and Lincoln public schools and other community service agencies - also support these reforms. We urge others to join in and advocate for changing the CPS system now. (For the complete text of this position paper, please see www.hvcn.org/info/can/.)

How many more children need to die before we become outraged enough to make substantive changes to our local and state child protective system?

To contribute essays to Other Voices, contact Mary Morgan, opinion editor, at 734-994-6605 or mmorgan@annarbornews.com.

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04/01/2007

Abuse case heads to Circuit Court

By: Sharon Stone , Contributing Reporter



Flint - A child abuse case in Fenton Township was bound over to Genesee County Circuit Court on Friday. Judge Richard L. Hughes determined there was sufficient evidence and testimony given to prove probable cause against Jessica Lake and Christopher Rowand.

Lake, 19, and Rowand, 23 were charged with first degree child abuse after they took Lake's then, 2½-year-old daughter to the emergency room at Genesys Health Park in Grand Blanc Township on Nov. 3, 2006 with injuries consistent with child abuse.

The two have remained in the Genesee County Jail since their arrest last November and the little girl is being cared for by her grandparents. Lake and Rowand were present during their preliminary exam Friday, however, they did not acknowledge each other and several times during witness testimony and presentation of evidence, Lake wiped tears from her eyes.

Lake's defense attorney is Denise Ketchmark and Rowand's attorney is David Megdell.

Testifying as an expert witness, Hurley Medical Center Chief of Staff Dr. Brian Nolan, who was at the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit when the girl was brought in after being transferred from Genesys, told the assistant prosecutor Jennifer McKellar that the victim's head injuries were consistent with those he's seen who were unrestrained and in a very bad high-speed automobile crash.

Nolan said the little girl was in a deep coma and on a ventilator when he first saw her. He said it was highly likely that she could have died at that point. He said he observed multiple bruises, in varying stages, all over the girl's body and several distinct burn marks on her stomach and chest area, most likely caused by a lit cigarette.

Having dealt with hundreds of child abuse cases, Nolan said the burns, bruises and head injury, "was consistent with child abuse." He said the fact that some of the bruises were observed in soft tissue areas, such as the buttocks and facial cheeks, was significant.

Kathleen Thompson, a social worker at Genesys testified that she was present when the child was first brought into the emergency room at Genesys. She said that she observed bruises, burns and hair missing from the back of the victim's head.

Thompson said the little girl was to be transported by ambulance to Hurley and alerted hospital security when she observed Lake and Rowand leaving the hospital parking lot in a dark colored SUV. Security notified the Genesee County Sheriff's Department, who then stopped the vehicle as it pulled onto Holly Road.

Sgt. David Dwyre of the Genesee County Sheriff's Department testified that Lake and Rowand were taken to the sheriff's department immediately and that he had interviewed Lake several times in the coming weeks. He said that Lake told him that she was with her daughter 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Dwyre said Lake initially told him that her daughter's injuries were self-inflicted, either by falling out of bed, falling in the bathtub or carrying ash trays around the apartment. Several interviews later, Dwyre said Lake's recollection of how her daughter was injured had changed.

Lake and Rowand are scheduled to be back in court for their Circuit Court arraignment at 8:15 a.m., on Monday, April 16, in Judge Judith Fullerton's courtroom.

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Mom, boyfriend face child abuse charges

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Monday, April 02, 2007

By Paul Janczewski

pjanczewski@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6333

A severe head injury. A deep coma. Cigarette burns on her chest. Bruises, old and new, covering the body.

For Dr. Brian Nolan, chief of Hurley Medical Center's pediatric unit, those injuries on 21/2-year-old Gina Marie Courtney all pointed to one cause.

Child abuse.

Central District Judge Richard L. Hughes last week ordered the only two people who had constant access to the little girl to stand trial on charges of first-degree child abuse.

Gina's mother, Jessica A. Lake, 19, and Lake's live-in boyfriend, Christopher L. Rowand, 22, both of Fenton, face an April 16 circuit court arraignment on the 15-year felonies.

During a preliminary examination, Nolan testified the girl was on a ventilator and in a deep coma in critical condition when he saw her Nov. 3.

He likened the head injury, which he estimated occurred about 12 hours earlier, to those he's seen on victims of car crashes who were not restrained by seat belts.

Nolan said the coloration of the body bruises indicated they had been inflicted at different times.

Witnesses said the child was originally taken to Genesys Regional Medical Center, and a social worker there tried to talk to Lake and Rowand about the injuries.

Kathleen Thompson told assistant Genesee County Prosecutor Jennifer McKellar that the couple said the child had fallen from the bed, and in a tub; they told her the burns occurred when the baby knocked over an ashtray.

But she said the two walked out of the hospital and left, so she notified security and they were stopped by a Genesee County paramedic who was at the hospital on another case.

The child was later transferred to Hurley.

Genesee County Sheriff's Department Sgt. David Dwyre said he spoke to both Lake and Rowand on several occasions during the investigation.

They initially told him the same story they told the social worker.

But later, Lake told him the child was not injured in that manner, but denied inflicting any bruises herself.

Rowand's mother also testified, saying she asked her son when he was in jail how the bruises occurred.

She said her son said he caused the burns on the baby's chest.

The child is now living with relatives, McKellar said, and is recovering, but is in therapy.

Lake was recently determined competent to stand trial after a forensic examination at a state center.

She and Rowand are lodged in the Genesee County Jail on \$500,000 cash bonds.

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Mom charged with offering 7-year-old daughter for sex

Child could be photographed or molested for cash, mother said

April 1, 2007

BY AMBER HUNT and DAN CORTEZ

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

A 33-year old Taylor mother, accused of arranging for her 7-year-old daughter to be sexually molested at a Romulus motel, was arraigned today on multiple charges of sexual abuse.

The woman was arraigned in 34th District Court in Romulus, where bond was set at \$1 million. Investigators are withholding her name to protect her children.

Wayne County Sheriff Warren Evans said the case was the most disgusting and exploitative he's seen in his 30-plus years of law enforcement.

"She made it clear that she would see that the child would comply," Evans said.

According to authorities, the woman allegedly provided an undercover deputy from the Internet Crime Unit with a menu that ranged from taking sexually suggestive photos of the child to sexual penetration, depending on how much money was offered.

The woman's five children, ages 6, 7, 9, 11 and 12, have been turned over to Child Protective Services.

Evans said the department is investigating whether any of the woman's children have been molested.

The suspect allegedly offered the undercover officer the opportunity to take photos of the girl. The woman was arrested Friday after she met with the undercover officer and discussed being paid more money in exchange for sex with the child.

It is the latest in a rash of similar incidents in metro Detroit.

In November, a Clinton Township man who was chief executive officer of a Warren credit union was charged after he tried to set up a sexual encounter over the Internet with a woman's 5-year-old daughter. The woman was really an undercover officer. The suspect, David Lance Rauch, has since pleaded guilty to three charges involving the use of a computer to commit a crime and child sexually abusive activity.

In February, a 37-year-old paramedic from Chino Hills, Calif., was arrested at Detroit Metro Airport after he had exchanged e-mails with an undercover detective from the Macomb County Sheriff's Office. The suspect had sought sex with two underage girls.

And in March, a Los Angeles man, 55, was arrested after he flew to Michigan allegedly to meet someone he thought was a mother offering her 5-year old daughter for sex.

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Mom charged in sex sting

She offered her daughter, 7, cops say

April 2, 2007

BY AMBER HUNT

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A 33-year-old Taylor woman -- arrested with bags of sex toys and children's outfits that police say she planned to let a man use to sexually abuse her 7-year-old daughter -- was arraigned Sunday on several sex abuse charges.

Wayne County sheriff's deputies arrested the woman about 6:30 p.m. Friday at a Romulus hotel, where officials say the woman brought her daughter to be abused. The prospective abuser, however, was an undercover sheriff's deputy.

"She made it clear that she would see that the child would comply," Sheriff Warren Evans said Sunday.

He said the case was the most disgusting and exploitative he has seen in his 30-plus years of law enforcement.

The woman, whose name isn't being released to protect the identity of the 7-year-old and the woman's four other children, was arraigned on five charges in 34th District Court in Romulus. A not guilty plea was entered on behalf of the woman, who wasn't represented by a lawyer at the arraignment. A \$1-million bond was set.

Evans said an undercover deputy with the sheriff's Internet crime unit contacted the woman, portraying himself as a photographer interested in child pornography. The woman told him she was a prostitute, Evans said.

"Even worse than that, she began talking about her children," Evans said.

The deputy had several online conversations with the woman, who indicated that the 7-year-old had been used in sex acts for money before, officials said.

She offered the deputy a menu of options, officials said, ranging from pornographic pictures to having sex with the girl. The woman also offered to perform sex acts alongside her daughter, Evans said.

When the woman arrived at the hotel to book a room, plainclothes deputies arrested her, said John Roach, spokesman for the sheriff's office.

The 7-year-old was turned over to Child Protective Services, as were her siblings--ages 6, 9, 11 and 12. Evans said investigators were trying to determine whether the other children have been offered for sex or molested.

Evans would not say how the deputy came into contact with the woman because, he said, it's part of a larger investigation.

Contact **AMBER HUNT** at alhunt@freepress.com. The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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April 2, 2007

Police call sex abuse case 'most disgusting'

Taylor mother jailed; she offered 7-year-old daughter for sex, cops say.

Jennifer Chambers / The Detroit News

ROMULUS -- A 33-year-old Taylor mother is accused of brokering a deal on the Internet to allow a man to have sex with her 7-year-old daughter while she photographed them in a case described by veteran police as "disgusting" and shocking.

According to investigators with the Wayne County Sheriff's Office, the mother -- who is not being named to protect the identity of her child -- told undercover officers she planned to sell the photographs to child porn collectors to make money.

A judge Sunday afternoon set a \$1 million bond for the woman, who faces four felony counts of child sexually abusive activity and using a computer to communicate with another person to commit a crime.

She is also charged with a misdemeanor count of prostitution. The woman is being held in the Wayne County jail.

"This is the most disgusting and exploitive situation I have ever been involved with in law enforcement in 35 years," said Wayne County Sheriff Warren Evans, whose Internet Crime Unit thwarted the woman's plans Friday evening.

Starting in December, the mother began communicating with an undercover deputy about prostituting herself, Evans said. The woman mentioned she wanted her daughter to begin modeling and suggested the child had been in sexually exploitive situations, escalating the probe.

Money was the motive for the deal, Evans said. The woman set the cheapest rate for photos of her daughter and the highest price for sex with the child, Evans said.

Deputies arrested the woman after she arrived with the child at 6:30 p.m. Friday at a Romulus hotel near Detroit Metropolitan Airport, where she had agreed to meet the man so he could molest the child.

Evans said the woman brought a duffel bag containing sex toys and another containing children's clothing. The woman told the deputy he could "try anything with her daughter if the price was right," Evans said.

She also told police "she would make sure that her daughter would comply with whatever the man wanted to do to her."

An arrest video showed the mother from the neck down, wearing jeans and white tennis shoes, with her hands cuffed behind her back.

It also showed an investigator talking to the 7-year-old with long light-brown hair, whose face was obscured.

It was not clear whether the daughter was aware of what had been planned for her, Evans said, adding deputies made the arrest calmly so as to not upset the child.

The video shown by police to reporters depicted two outfits the mother had taken to the hotel room for the child to wear during the encounter: a white lace dress with straps and red and pink striped dress.

Neighbors who knew the mother and her family -- four girls and one boy ages 6-12 -- when they lived in a small single-story home in Taylor said they had little money and often borrowed lawn mowers and tools to take care of their tiny yard. They moved from the neighborhood last year after being unable to pay the rent.

Evans said his investigators are looking into whether any of the woman's four other children have been molested. All five children have been placed in protective custody.

Judge Vesta Svenson set an April 12 preliminary exam in Romulus District Court. If convicted, the woman faces up to 20 years in prison.

It is the latest child porn case involving the Internet, in which young children are being offered for sex in exchange for money.

The former CEO of a Warren-based credit union will be sentenced Wednesday on charges he used the Internet to arrange for sex with a 5-year-old girl.

David Rauch, 53, of Clinton Township was arrested by Macomb County Sheriff's deputies in November after chatting online with an undercover investigator from the Macomb County Sheriff's Office. The officer, who was posing as a mother of two, exchanged messages with Rauch, who messaged that he wanted to have sex with the girl at the mother's "home" in Clinton Township.

A California paramedic was arrested Feb. 23 by Macomb deputies on a similar charge.

Brian Flaherty, 37, of Chino Hills, Calif., faces a federal charge of crossing state lines to induce a child to have sex after he responded to an undercover officer posing as a single mother who was looking for men to have sex with her children.

You can reach Jennifer Chambers at (248) 647-7402 or jchambers@detnews.com. Detroit News Staff Writer Santiago Esparza contributed to this report.

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New sex charges for day care owner

April 1, 2007

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ADRIAN -- The owner of a home day care business was charged Friday with 33 new felony charges in an ongoing investigation that alleges he had sex with children under 13, police said.

The new charges bring to 77 the number of felony counts against Douglas Clark, who operated Guardian Family Daycare from his home in Adrian, about 35 miles southeast of Jackson.

Among other charges filed Friday, Clark faces 21 counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, five counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct and a felony firearm count, police Detective Vincent Emrick said in a statement.

First-degree criminal sexual conduct carries a life sentence upon conviction.

Clark is being held in the Lenawee County Jail in lieu of a \$5-million bond.

He was arrested in March and charged with having oral sex with an infant.

Police began an investigation after being contacted by a parent of a child at the center.

Last month, the Michigan Department of Human Services suspended Clark's license. The notice said Clark had first obtained a certificate of registration to operate a day care in his home for six children beginning in July 2002.

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Man accused in 14-year-old sex assault on toddler

By Michael P. McConnell
Daily Tribune Staff Writer

FERNDALE -- A Waterford Township man is accused of sexually assaulting his live-in girlfriend's young daughter almost 14 years ago when he lived in Ferndale, and the girl was four years old.

Dean L. Cassani, 42, was due in Ferndale 43rd District Court for a preliminary examination but failed to appear because he was arrested in Warren and charged with two counts of assault with a dangerous weapon on Thursday.

Cassani was free on \$125,000 personal bond in the sexual assault case when he became involved in a dispute with a tenant that led to his arrest in Warren, police said.

The Ferndale charges came to light in January after the young girl, now 17, was at school and saw a class video on sexual predators, said Ferndale Detective Kenneth Denmark.

"The victim became very upset and was sent to a school counselor," Denmark said.

The girl was subsequently interviewed by county Child Protective Services and sexual abuse counselors, he added.

"We determined during interviews (with counselors) that she was able to give detailed accounts of what happened to her," Denmark said.

Cassani is believed to have left the bed he shared with his girlfriend early one morning while she was asleep, police said. He then went into the young girl's room and sexually assaulted her, Denmark said.

Cassani is charged with five counts of first-degree criminal sexual assault. Each count has a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.

After sexually assaulting the girl, Cassani threatened the girl, police said.

"He told her that if she ever told anyone what had happened he would kill her and her mother," Denmark said.

Cassani's preliminary examination in Ferndale Court on Thursday was adjourned until 3 p.m. on April 19 because he was in jail in Warren.

Cassani was charged Thursday in Warren 37th District Court on two felony counts of assault with a dangerous weapon. He was jailed in lieu of \$50,000 cash bond. His preliminary hearing in that case is set for April 12.

Police said the suspect apparently owns some property and went to confront a tenant before he was arrested.

Contact Michael P. McConnell at mike.mcconnell@dailytribune.com or at (248) 591-2571.

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Article published Apr 1, 2007

Parent wants bus drivers double-checked

BY REBECCA JONES
STAFF WRITER

Livonia Public Schools officials say they know who their bus drivers are. Trinity Transportation has conducted background checks on theirs.

But parent Kim Naccashian wants LPS to double-check Trinity's drivers, who have been hired as district contractors.

"If they're going to outsource," she said, "we need to have something on file to document who's driving our kids."

Naccashian first told the school board in October that she thinks LPS should run its own background checks. Now, she's offered to pay for them herself. "We as parents need the assurance our children are safe from drunk drivers, criminal sexual conduct, etc. on our buses."

Naccashian raised the issue again after reading January news reports of a school district in Ohio that had to shut down for a day when a check of their contracted bus drivers showed that eight had drunken driving convictions. Another was charged with cocaine possession, according to the Associated Press articles.

Rod Hosman, administrative services director for LPS, said that Trinity has performed its own background checks, and that under the law, substitute bus drivers are held to the same standards as those employed directly by LPS.

"We follow all of the guidelines set forth in Michigan law," said Tracy Akers, general manager for Trinity Transportation of Wyandotte. "We meet or exceed all of the requirements ... Fingerprinting is included in the program."

Under the state's Pupil Transportation Act, all bus drivers must meet physical qualifications and have background checks on file with their employer, which specifically note if the driver has ever been convicted of sexual assaults or attempts, child abuse or possession of child pornography. By law, school bus drivers must be 18 and have no more than six points on their driving records.

A stricter law, called the Pupil Protection Act, requires fingerprints and state and federal criminal records checks for all school employees and contractors, including bus drivers. Schools -- public and private -- have until July 1, 2008, to collect the information. Schools will be required to fire anyone convicted as a sex offender. Other felons may work for schools if the superintendent and school board approve.

Hosman said the district is in the process of gathering fingerprints for its employees, starting with new hires. Until the new law takes effect, he said the district was told that Trinity's checks are sufficient.

"If (the Michigan Department of Education) gets back to us and tells us something different, we will comply," Hosman said. LPS uses six or seven Trinity drivers regularly, and LPS is comfortable with those drivers, Hosman said. LPS has an unusual number of drivers on medical leave this year, he said.

Trinity Transportation also has contracts with other districts in Southgate, Dearborn, Trenton, Wyandotte and Lincoln Park.

Taking the bully by the horns

Katie Oliveri and
Andy Rathbun

The Battle Creek Enquirer

April 2, 2007

Eleven-year-old Khalil Tubbs has been a victim of bullying on more than one occasion.

He's been teased, pushed and hit, according to the Springfield Middle School fifth-grader.

"They call you inappropriate names," Tubbs said.

Springfield eighth-grader Hailey Baldwin said she sees bullying frequently, especially arguments and bickering among girls.

She said there's a new student who's being bullied, and she has told her peers who pick on the girl to stop.

"It's not really right," said Baldwin, 13. "She just came here."

While most area school districts already have bullying policies in place, and school officials say they are working, the Democratic-controlled state House on Wednesday approved bills requiring schools to implement policies that address the behavior.

One bill riled conservatives by referencing sexual orientation as it singled out groups in need of protection. Most Republicans opposed the bill, which could get derailed in the GOP-controlled state Senate.

Some schools are working to update their policies while others have implemented guidelines with specific consequences for bullies.

Once Denise Myers, principal of Riverside Elementary School, saw bullying was a top concern in a community survey taken a few years ago, that was all the proof she needed to be proactive.

While a policy won't wipe out bullying, Myers said, it gives school officials a better tool to deal with it.

"If schools don't think they have a bullying problem, they're living in denial," said Myers, Riverside's principal for seven years.

She said through the success of the school's bullying policy and discipline guidelines, which was in place by the 2005-06 school year, her school has developed an anti-bullying culture. Westlake Elementary has a similar policy.

Suspensions have gone down and kids are aware of the rules, Myers said. Now she mostly sees

first-time offenses.

"There's a very heightened sense of what bullying is at Riverside," Myers said.

She said the guidelines level the playing field by holding all students to the same standard.

"There are no exceptions," said Myers, who has suspended kindergartners.

At her school of about 350 students, pre-K through fourth grade, kids are taught how to be good bystanders, how they can intervene and how to "report, not rat," an incident, she said.

Fourth-grader Mitch Ostafin said all schools should have an anti-bullying program like Riverside's.

Ostafin, 10, said he has been at the school for six years. In first grade, he noticed a lot of bullying. Now, he sees less of it.

"If someone is getting bullied, now they'd stop because they get a consequence," he said.

Tammi Lawrence, assistant principal of Springfield Middle School, said she looks at ways to help students being bullied, discussing what the bully wants and what the victim can do as a response.

"Middle school is a horrific time for bullying," she said.

As far as consequences for bullying, Lawrence said the school's discipline is very progressive. But she said, "you get to a point of persistent bullying that can lead to suspension."

She sees a lot of name calling, particularly among the girls at her school of 447 fifth- through eighth-grade students. Her staff looks out for incidents.

Schools should have polices, Lawrence said, but flexibility must be part of the guidelines since "every situation is different," she said.

In Lansing, the House bill referred to a state Board of Education policy to define bullying as harassment ignited by traits such as weight, height, race, sexual orientation and gender identity. The state board adopted a model anti-bullying policy in September which districts can follow.

Critics have lasered in on two characteristics: sexual orientation and gender identity.

American Family Association of Michigan President Gary Glenn said the real goal of the anti-bullying bill was to "advance homosexuals' agenda." The bill created a "protected class" for gays, segregating children while condoning homosexual activity, he said.

"We feel that threatens to put children's health at risk," he said.

But others feel certain people are more susceptible to abuse from their fellow students.

Christine Dore, a 2003 Lakeview High School graduate, said in 2001, she co-founded with friends a group at Lakeview High called Equality and Safety of Students Everywhere.

They had learned many students were being bullied, some for their race or religion, and others their sexual orientation. The group caught some backlash, however. Students involved received hate letters, and the driveway of a group member was painted with hate slogans, according to

Dore.

"It was really sad and it really showed us a group like this is necessary," said Dore, 21, a senior at Western Michigan University.

She said she thinks it's a good idea for all schools to adopt anti-bullying policies, ensuring sexual orientation and other characteristics are stated within the policy.

In the House vote last week, four Republicans broke party ranks to support the bill defining bullying, including state Rep. Lorence Wenke, a vocal supporter of gay rights.

Gays are bullied more often and more intensely than other students, the Richland Township legislator said. By specifying a group in a policy, it may be better protected.

"I think it will help. I think it's a big step forward," he said of the bill. "This is very important to the gay community."

State Rep. Mike Nofs, R-Battle Creek, voted against the legislation. He's against bullying, he said, but was philosophically opposed to singling out certain types.

"Why do we have to do that?" he asked. "Why don't we just say bullying is against the law?"

In order to become law, the bill needs approval in the Republican-controlled state Senate and the governor's signature.

Senate Minority Leader Mark Schauer, D-Bedford Township, said the bill has his support and four Republican co-sponsors. It's unclear when or if Republican leadership will move the bill forward.

"They should," Schauer said. "We should not let politics and sort of fear-mongering get in the way of protecting kids."

Katie Oliveri covers education. She can be reached at 966-0589 or koliveri@battlecr.gannett.com. Andy Rathbun covers government. He can be reached at 962-3380 or arathbun@battlecr.gannett.com.

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Exchange Club, community, rally behind National Child Abuse Prevention Month

Community leaders are shedding light on child abuse during National Child Abuse Prevention and Awareness Month.

The Exchange Club has taken this issue on as a priority and will host speakers throughout April. The Farmington/Farmington Hills Exchange Club meets at noon every Wednesday at Cowley's in downtown Farmington.

Speakers are scheduled for 12:30 p.m. and include Amanda Faughnan from Common Ground Sanctuary on April 4; Farmington Public Safety Director Chuck Nebus and Hills Detective Greg Hughes on April 11; Dr. Randy Bruce, psychologist and Farmington Hills city councilman on April 18; and Megan Widman, from HAVEN women's shelter on April 25.

In addition, the Farmington Hills City Council will adopt the following Proclamation during National Child Abuse Prevention and Awareness Month:

"Whereas, approximately 9,000 cases of suspected child abuse are reported annually in Oakland County and current reports reveal that one in every four girls and one in every six boys in this country will be sexually abused before their 18th birthday; and

Whereas, since so many cases go unreported, this is only a portion of the problem that affects children regardless of age, race or gender; and

Whereas, the State of Michigan has mandatory reporting by professionals of any suspected child abuse and neglect incidences; and

Whereas, technology has brought with it a new and dangerous form of child endangerment, the online predator, and parents must be conscientious and monitor their child's computer use; and

Whereas, effective abuse and neglect prevention programs succeed because of the involvement and partnerships created among schools, social service agencies, religious and civic organizations, the business community, and law enforcement agencies; and

Whereas, the Child Abuse and Neglect Council of Oakland County is a prominent advocate for the safety and protection of all children as a leading resource in the prevention of abuse through intervention, treatment, research, and education in collaboration with other community agencies and organizations.

Now, therefore, be it resolved that I, Vicki Barnett, Mayor of the City of Farmington Hills, on behalf of the City Council, do hereby proclaim April 2007 as National Child Abuse Prevention and Awareness Month in Farmington Hills and encourage citizens, community agencies, organizations, and businesses to increase their participation in our efforts to prevent the abuse of children, thereby strengthening and protecting the community in which we live."

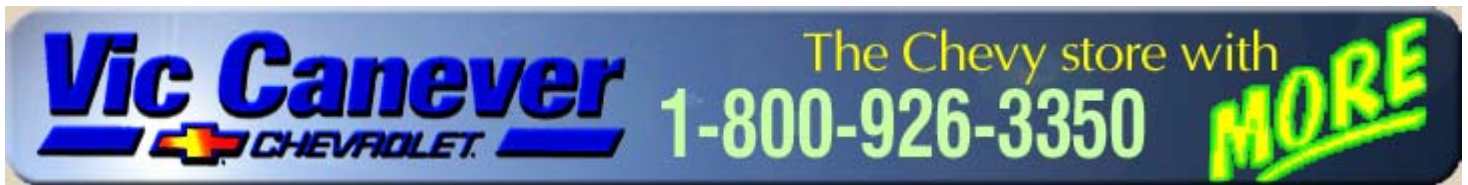


04/02/2007

April is National Child Abuse Awareness Month



Members of the Holly Township Board of Trustees voted unanimously to recognize the month of April as National Child Abuse Awareness Month. The board encourages all citizens, community agencies, organizations and businesses to increase their participation in efforts to prevent the abuse of area children, thereby strengthening and protecting the community.



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Monday, April 02, 2007

Wayne briefs

Canton Township

Workshops target abuse of children

Twin initiatives are underway to combat child abuse in the township, officials announced last week. The Police Department recently formed a focus group of child advocates to survey the extent of the problem and create solutions. The group also will contribute to "positive parenting" workshops. The first seminar is 6 p.m. April 23 at Summit on the Park, 4600 Canton Parkway. Speakers include a detective with the Michigan Internet Crimes Against Children task force. Call (734) 394-5325.



State should have helped Rose

FLINT JOURNAL LETTER TO THE EDITOR

FENTON

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Sunday, April 01, 2007

JOURNAL READER

My name is Deanna Patrosso. I am 12 years old, and after reading "Who failed Rose?" [March 18, Page A1], I am incredibly outraged to know that the social workers didn't take Rose Kelley out of her home. I think this is horrible, and even though Rose is gone, I think social workers and other health groups should still do something about it.

Who lets his daughter get infested by bugs and says he's embarrassed by it? After I read this story, I asked myself, are the social workers and health groups really doing all they can do to help people? They certainly didn't do so with Rose.

Deanna Patrosso

Fenton

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Grown up and out: What's after foster care?

Young people who leave the system face a rough road

Sunday, April 01, 2007

BY LIZ COBBS

News Staff Reporter

When he turned 19, Jermaine Campbell thought he was ready to live on his own.

Campbell had been in foster care since he was 11. He had lived in 10 foster homes and three residential facilities and was tired of shuffling from place to place.

But soon after leaving a transitional independent living program, Campbell found himself living on the streets.

He carried his clothes and personal items around in garbage bags. He slept in parking garages for about two months, sometimes breaking into cars to sleep in the back seat. He ate meals at a shelter or at an alternative education school he was attending. When hungry and desperate, Campbell said he stole from a grocery store "just to eat."

"When you leave foster care, the only preparation you get is in money management," said Campbell, now 20. "No one prepares you for life and life hits you hard. When you try to take that first step and you fall down, there's no love out there."

Campbell said he stayed at the Robert J. Delonis Center in downtown Ann Arbor for about three months but was eventually kicked out of the homeless shelter because he stayed too long. Shelter rules allow individuals to stay there for up to 90 days.

Campbell and other young people who left foster care without being adopted or reunited with their families say it's hard to make it on their own. They fall behind in school or drop out and have trouble finding jobs and affordable living situations.

Building a support system

In Michigan, youths can stay in foster care until they turn 20 but can leave at 18 if they choose. An independent living program provides money for room and board and up to \$5,000 a year for educational or vocational training until age 21. After that, they're on their own.

The number of youths in this situation is rising. Michigan Department of Human Services statistics show 525 youths aged out of the foster care system in 2006, up from 481 in 2005. In Washtenaw County, 20 youths aged out in 2006, six more than in 2005.

Cynthia Maritato, director of Washtenaw County's DHS office, said her staff has been trying to get ahead of the problem by working with youths still in foster care to better prepare them for living independently. DHS has also been reaching out to community partners for assistance, Maritato said.

Susan Reynolds Bunton, DHS contract administrator in Washtenaw County and Family to Family coordinator, said community members are needed to provide "door openers," such as internships, jobs, transportation - even discount hair cuts.

The Student Advocacy Center of Michigan also works to assist youths transitioning from foster care. It's not uncommon for SAC Executive Director Leslie Harrington or her staff to drive former foster care youths to class or even to the grocery store in between their daily work duties.

"Their lives are so chaotic," Harrington said of youths who have left foster care. "To find a place to stay, hold down a job and go to school is nearly impossible. If we don't keep them in high school or keep them in college, these kids will become the next homeless."

The center receives about \$50,000 a year in grants from the Speckhard-Knight Charitable Foundation and the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation Youth Council to assist youths transitioning from foster care.

'No path to follow'

Maintaining a stable living situation is not easy, teenagers say.

Kayla Holley, 19, said she got an apartment last year, but her roommate abruptly left after four months. She moved out because she could not pay rent on her own and stayed with a friend in Westland.

"This past year has been the hardest year of my life," Holley said.

She said she wants a job but has to first get a driver's license for identification purposes. She said plans to finish her General Educational Development requirements in May.

"When I finish my GED and walk across the stage, that would be the best thing I can do for myself right now," said Holley, who has lived in three foster homes and two group homes. "When I do that, I'm going to feel like I'm No. 1."

Education is the key to surviving foster care as well as surviving life, said Brandon Johnson, 18, who's in the independent living program.

"We are the next generation, we are the future," said Johnson, who's enrolled at Washtenaw Community College. "Do you honestly want a future full of illiterate men and women?"

Johnson said when he was younger, he wanted to be a doctor. But life took a toll on his dream. His mother died when he was 4, Johnson said, and his father has been in and out of his life over the years, he said. He's been in eight different living situations, including living with his grandmother. He entered the foster care system at age 9.

"I became angry," he said. "I wanted to succeed, I had the ambition, I had the drive, but there was no path to follow. It was like walking in the jungle at night."

An armed robbery conviction landed him an eight-month stint at a state juvenile facility. It was while he was locked up, Johnson said, that he came to understand the value of learning and earned a GED. "I found my home inside of books," he said.

Johnson has since become a father of two children, which he says has further motivated him to earn a criminal justice degree. His plan is to work with youths involved in the foster care system.

"If I can help one or two kids, maybe they can help change this system," Johnson said.

Meanwhile, Campbell is taking GED classes while applying for jobs and looking for another place to live. He can't afford the room rent at the house in Ypsilanti where he is living.

Campbell, who now receives Supplemental Security Income of \$623 monthly, said his goals are to have his own apartment - not just a rental room, his own car and a job.

Campbell said he keeps getting turned down for jobs, such as waiting tables or being a cashier, because he doesn't have previous work experience. That gets him down sometimes, he said.

"Basically, when I put all my eggs in one basket, all my eggs usually get crushed," he said. "It discourages me sometimes and makes me not try sometimes ... (but) you just gotta keep on pushing."

Liz Cobbs can be reached at lcobbs@annarbornews.com or 734-994-6810.

Help for

struggling youths

The state Department of Human Services operates the Michigan Youth Opportunity Initiative, funded by the Jim Casey Foundation, an incentive-based program for youths and young adults age 14 to 24 who have been in foster care or have aged out of the system.

Among other things, the initiative allows youths to open savings accounts with a dollar-for-dollar match from the state, up to \$1,000 a year. MYOI also has statewide youth advisory boards, including one in Washtenaw County, to raise awareness of and call for action on issues affecting older youth in foster care.

DHS also has a program called Building Community Partners. DHS workers meet with area businesses, nonprofit groups and interested individuals to encourage them to provide services in such areas as education, employment, health care and housing.

- To donate or to get involved: Call Renee Smith at 734-481-2034 or e-mail her at smithr25@michigan.gov.

Source: Renee Smith, MYOI coordinator, Washtenaw County DHS.

Those who leave, by the numbers

A Wayne State University study released in October found that, among youth who left foster care:

17%

had been homeless, having spent an average of two months on the street.

27%

spent time in jail.

48%

had children of their own.

71%

reported being sexually or physically victimized.

\$600

The earnings per month of those who worked; the most common job was in the fast food industry. Youths were unemployed for long periods.

Note: The average age of the 264 youths interviewed was 20, and they had been out of foster care an average of 3 1/2 years.

Source: "Youth Aging Out of Foster Care in Southeast Michigan: A Follow-up Study, October 2006" by psychologists Patrick J. Fowler and Paul A. Toro, Wayne State University.

Suggestions

for solutions

A 45-member statewide task force in 2006 made 21 recommendations for helping older youths in foster care. The task force included youths who were or had been in foster care as well as representatives from government, schools and nonprofit agencies.

Some recommendations, such as extending foster care to age 21, are being studied. Among the recommendations that have been acted on:

- Housing assistance for homeless foster youth. The Michigan State Housing Development Authority has allocated \$3 million to provide rental assistance for young people ages 18-24, for a maximum of two years.
- Extended Medicaid coverage, to age 21.

- Proper documentation. Youth who have been in foster care need to have birth certificates, Social Security cards or other government-issued IDs, which are necessary to open bank accounts or get jobs.

Source: Interdepartmental Task Force on Service to At-Risk Youth Transitioning to Adulthood.

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Man, 18, in transition getting life together

Sunday, April 01, 2007

BY LIZ COBBS

News Staff Reporter

Q. What are you doing now?

A. I'm a high school senior graduating this year from Huron High School (in Ann Arbor). I also have a 3-month-old girl.

Q. How difficult is it to go to school and take care of a baby?

A. It's hard going to school. Some days, I can't go to school because there's no baby sitter. (A friend) is helping out now getting a baby sitter.

Q. What keeps you going?

A. People who came in my life, my brothers and mentors, helped me see my life. I used to be in gangs and all that nonsense. They told me that I needed to grow up and be a man. I never met my father and I was angry about that. But, my brothers talked to me and let me know that even though our dad is not here, I can still be successful in life. They told me, "You've got a child that you're taking care of." I said, "That's true." I'm trying to do something better than my dad."

Q. What do you want to do after you graduate?

A. I like playing basketball. I hope to get a basketball scholarship, if I can keep playing.

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Bay Pines to get privatized?



A move is on in the state Legislature to privatize Escanaba's Bay Pines Center, shown above, and other state juvenile detention and treatment facilities. Opponents say the move would cost the state more money and may result in Bay Pines closing its doors. (Daily Press photo by Julie Knauf)

By Julie Knauf - jknauf@dailypress.net

ESCANABA — The possible privatization of Bay Pines Center — a state juvenile detention and treatment facility located in Escanaba — has sparked opposition from residents and state legislators.

The center is one of several state-operated juvenile justice facilities that would be privatized under Michigan Senate Human Services Appropriations subcommittee proposed budget for 2007-08. State Sen. Bill Hardiman made the proposal in February in an attempt to slash costs for Michigan.

In actuality, the proposal could possibly increase expenditures and make it difficult for many youth to receive adequate treatment, say opponents.

From 1951 until 1994, residents of the Upper Peninsula fought to implement a regional detention and treatment center so youth wouldn't be sent downstate to have their needs met, said Dane Ross, director of Bay Pines. Today, the center has a very high success rate due in large part to the close proximity boys and girls have to their families, he said. Privatization of Bay Pines, however, would likely end in its closure, as companies operating the facility would send youth to private agencies downstate, closer to urban areas and away from their relatives, he said.

"We are the last regional center...and we offer services to youth that private agencies do not," said Ross.

For example, private agencies typically have medium or minimum security and don't offer many of the programs available at Bay Pines.

"Private agencies, especially those for-profit, are very concerned about the bottom line, so youth with high medical costs or that are high-liability — self-harming, violent, or sexual predators, etc. — agencies try to shy away from and send to state-operated facilities like ours," said Ross. "I don't think these agencies are less concerned about

children but they have to answer to stockholders and make a profit. They face other factors that are not always in the best interest of youth.”

Bay Pines offers medium and maximum security as well as an array of programs for youth facing sexual offenses, felony offenses and/or drug abuse. It also provides boys and girls with an opportunity to receive education and earn their way back into the community via restorative justice, or participating in local projects and activities that help the area.

If the facility closes, “high-liability youth” may be sent out-of-state to find and receive adequate treatment.

Furthermore, 44 Bay Pine employees would be laid off and many businesses that provide contractual services for the facility could suffer financial losses, said Ross.

Proponents of privatizing juvenile justice facilities say doing so will cut expenses for Michigan because private agencies per diem rate is less expensive than those which are state-operated.

State Rep. Tom Casperson (R-Escanaba) disagrees. “It’s like comparing apples to oranges,” he said. Bay Pines’ job is to house and treat youth that private agencies typically deny — boys and girls who are more expensive to treat. Bay Pines is required to help these youth and fund their “enormous” medical bills and drug prescriptions, said Casperson.

“That is the critical difference, that the private agencies can pick and choose which youth they get, picking the kids they believe are easier to handle...which will all be reflected in the cost of (running) the facility,” he said.

Also, many private agencies may not, in fact, be less expensive to operate than facilities like Bay Pines. Private facilities list lower per diem costs but they don’t include education and medical expenses, said Ross. Tax payers, then, end up funding these expenses in another way. Bay Pines, on the other hand, already includes education and medical costs in their per diem rates, he said.

The expenses required to transport youth to private facilities downstate or elsewhere for adequate treatment could actually increase state expenditures, said Casperson.

Currently, staff at Bay Pines and residents of Delta County have been joining the fight to prevent the facility from being privatized, said Ross. He has contacted several state legislators on the subject, including Casperson who hopes to arrange for Hardiman to tour Bay Pines during a visit to the Upper Peninsula in May.

“I have spent time with Bay Pines staff multiple times and they’re doing a wonderful job helping youth while at the same time, trying to be as cost efficient as possible. I just hope I can show Hardiman that, how valuable the facility is,” said Casperson.



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Published April 1, 2007

Fight for juveniles' second chance renewed

Bill would prohibit sentences without chance of parole

By Brian McVicar
Capital News Service

Some lawmakers are again fighting to give the possibility of a second chance to inmates who were convicted as juveniles and sentenced to life without parole.

Legislation re-introduced this year would prohibit sentencing a juvenile to life in prison without the chance of parole. It would also grant inmates who've served at least 10 years of a life-without-parole sentence they received as juveniles the possibility of parole.

Michigan, along with 43 other states, sentences offenders under 18 to life without parole. First-degree murder is the only crime carrying that sentence.

State Rep. Mark Meadows, who introduced one of the proposals, said sentencing a juvenile to life in prison without parole is "giving up on the chance of somebody that could be rehabilitated."

The bill is "a common-sense way of realizing that young people sometimes make the wrong choices," the East Lansing Democrat said.

According to the Department of Corrections, 339 prisoners are serving such sentences.

Of them, 154 committed the crime before turning 17, the age that youths are no longer eligible for juvenile court jurisdiction.

The department said the proposal would offer a chance of parole to about 200 lifers already incarcerated for 10 or more years.

Elizabeth Arnovits, executive director of the Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency, said that imposing such a stiff penalty on juveniles is an outdated policy that needs to be changed.

Research has shown that juveniles lack the same ability to reason and control impulses as adults, so sentencing them the under the same guidelines doesn't make sense, she said.

"They may not be the same person they were when they were younger," Arnovits said.

In the 1980s, lawmakers reacted to the sharp increase in violent juvenile crime by allowing prosecutors to try defendants 14 and older as adults without a judge's consent for major crimes such as murder.

Michigan ranks third after Louisiana and Pennsylvania in the number of juveniles serving life without

parole, according to the Senate Fiscal Agency.

Sen. Liz Brater, D-Ann Arbor, another sponsor, said the bill doesn't mean that young criminals shouldn't be punished. It means "we must provide a mechanism to determine if there is a chance they could eventually become productive members of society."

"We cannot just toss them away," Brater said.

Karl Clark, executive director of Second Chance Legislation, said the problem of the sentencing is awareness.

"Most people aren't aware that kids are being locked up without parole," said Clark, whose group is pushing for the sentencing change.

"There's some people who aren't ready to get let out, and there's some people that it's tragic that they're locked up."

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Funeral money for poor may be sliced

Monday, April 02, 2007

By Chris Gautz

cgautz@citpat.com -- 768-4926

When Jackson's poor die, the state, the funeral homes and cemeteries work to cover the cost of their final preparations.

But now, Gov. Jennifer Granholm is proposing to slash the state's contribution by about one-third in her latest executive order budget cut. All the idea needs is a House panel's approval.

"The folks who need it the most will be basically cut off and not left with many options," said Steve Lauer, owner and director of S.D. Lauer Funeral Home & Cremation Service, located in Jackson and Concord. "What (the state) expect(s) funeral homes to do with what they give is a joke."

As it stands, the state spends up to \$909 to defray cremation or burial costs and some type of service for the indigent. Granholm's proposed cut of \$738,700 out of the Department of Human Services' budget would drop the contribution to \$680.

The payments are split three ways between the funeral home, cemetery and vault company.

"Nobody's breaking even on this," Lauer said.

David Clark, superintendent of St. John's Catholic Cemetery, 403 E. South St., said cemeteries receive less than \$200 of the state funds. The cost for burial at St. John's is \$1,155.

"The money we receive now from the state is not close to enough to cover the burial charges, so we just end up eating it," Clark said.

The city of Jackson won't be affected by the cut because its two cemeteries, Mount Evergreen and Woodland, do not accept indigent burials. They require the full amount -- \$1,250 -- for burial up front, and that doesn't include the cost of a vault.

Phil Douma, executive director of the Michigan Funeral Directors Association, said funding for these services came after the state partnered with the funeral profession years ago.

"This reduction really approaches the state not fulfilling its end of that partnership," Douma said.

He said that since 1999, there has been a steady whittling down of the state's contribution.

In 1998, the state payment was \$1,410.

"The state has been trying to get out of the business of burials for a long time," said Gerald Johnson, director of The House of Johnson Funeral Home, 235 W. Prospect St.

"If they didn't have to, they wouldn't do it at all."

Johnson said he expects the state eventually will stop offering financial assistance.

"They're just one or two steps away," Johnson said.

This is why Johnson says he preaches to people to start thinking about a will and making other proper preparations early.

"Get your business in order," he said.

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In the county

Monday, April 02, 2007

Maureen Sorbet, a state human services department spokeswoman, said the state last year spent \$5.25 million for 6,905 indigent burials in Michigan.

In Jackson County, there were 58 indigent burials, at a cost to the state of \$38,554. The average cost was \$664.

To qualify as indigent, a person has to have less cash assets than what the state would provide for an indigent burial, Sorbet said.

"You have to be very, very poor," she said.

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Mississippi, Michigan Neck And Neck

MIRS, March 30, 2007

Mississippi edged out Michigan by one-tenth of a percentage point for the nation's highest unemployment rate in February at 6.7 percent, but Michigan is still the only state in the union not to have seen employment gains over the past 12 months.

Michigan has seen a loss of a national high of 55,300 jobs from February 2006 to February 2007, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Its unemployment rate was the second-highest at 6.6 percent in February. Over the year, only Indiana, Michigan and Ohio have seen decreases in the number of jobs.

On the bright side, Michigan saw numerically, the fifth-highest increase in jobs since January (9,300) in February, while Midwest neighbors Ohio and Indiana saw employment decreases of 9,700 and 7,400, respectively, since that period, the BLS reported.

In February Hawaii, Utah and Wyoming reported the lowest unemployment rates (2.3 percent) each and four other states registered jobless rates below 3.0 percent. After Mississippi and Michigan, Alaska and South Carolina (6.1 percent) tied for the third highest unemployment rate. The national unemployment rate was 4.5 percent.



THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Empty Bowls fills big need

Concordia, Sidetrack present fundraiser for crisis center

Sunday, April 01, 2007

BY JORDAN MILLER

News Staff reporter

Students, teachers and community members met in the sun-filled ceramics room at Concordia University to make ceramic bowls that will, for a time, remain empty. The bowls will serve both as a fundraising tool for the SOS Community Services food pantry, and as a symbol that people around the world and in the community go hungry every day.

"It's a way for us to reach out," said Gary Gray, a 22-year-old Concordia student and co-chair of Artists in Residence, the student group that helped organize the bowl-making. "We make bowls to remind others that there are still people who are homeless and people who need feeding."

The Empty Bowls program was started in 1990 by an art teacher at Lahser High School in Bloomfield Hills whose students were looking for a creative way to raise funds for a food drive. The class hosted a fundraiser where guests were served a simple meal of soup and bread and invited to take home a bowl as a reminder of world hunger.

That same model is still used at Empty Bowls fundraisers across the country, including the upcoming event Wednesday, April 11, 5 p.m.-8 p.m., at the Sidetrack Bar and Grill, 56 E. Cross St. Dinner tickets are \$10, which includes soup, bread and a bowl to take home. Bowls also will be available for sale, and all proceeds from the event will benefit the SOS food pantry, which is almost exclusively dependent on donations. Last year the event raised around \$900.

Consumers can use the food pantry up to four times a year to receive a bag that supplies each member of their family with enough food for one day.

"It really is a way to make sure that people don't have to make tough choices like 'do I pay my heating bill or do I feed my family,'" SOS community relations coordinator Nancy Shore said. "It isn't just a handout. We actually talk to people and see if we can give them other resources and emotional support. It's like a one-stop shop for resources for people in need, especially families."

Jordan Miller can be reached at jmiller@annarbornews.com or 734-482-2263.

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County may help guard seniors

Tax could create protective post

GENESEE COUNTY

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Sunday, April 01, 2007

By Ron Fonger

rfonger@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6317

GENESEE COUNTY - Some funds from a new senior citizens tax might be used to manage the affairs of people 60 or older who can't take care of themselves - a need brought to light by embezzlement charges against Flint lawyer Shannon Pitcher.

County Probate Judges Robert E. Weiss and Jennie E. Barkey have asked the county's Senior Services Advisory Committee to consider their proposal for a county Office of Public Guardian, calling the current system little more than a continuing crisis.

The advisory committee makes recommendations on how to spend money generated by the county's new 0.7-mill property tax for senior services.

Until now, most of the debate has focused on funding such services as home-delivered meals, home health care, and local senior centers.

But Weiss said the Pitcher case shows the pitfalls of the current guardianship and conservatorship system, which is burdened with about 1,900 open files. Few lawyers or agencies are interested in handling cases, he said.

"We're going through a nightmare with the system we have now," Weiss said. "We saw what can happen."

A legal guardian is someone authorized by a court to make decisions for another person, usually because he or she can't care for himself or herself because of disability, age or incapacity.

A conservator is limited to managing another person's money. However, it's not unusual for someone to serve as both guardian and conservator, giving that person immense power over that senior's life.

Police and prosecutors say Pitcher embezzled money from the clients she was trusted to watch out for. She is charged with four counts of embezzlement from a vulnerable adult, each a 10-year felony. Her case is pending in Genesee County Circuit Court.

Weiss said a new county office eventually could handle all such cases, including those of minors and adults younger than 60 who cannot care for themselves.

Weiss said other funding could pay for nonsenior services.

Senior Advisory Chairwoman Carol B. Arvoy said she hasn't made up her mind about whether she will support the proposal - one of many that will compete for millage money.

QUICK TAKE

Whats happening?

Genesee County Probate Judges Robert E. Weiss and Jennie E. Barkey have proposed creating a new Office of Public Guardian.

The office would help handle guardianships and conservatorships for those 60 years old or older who cannot manage their own affairs.

There are few lawyers or individuals willing to act as guardian and conservator now, according to the judges.

The office would cost an estimated \$300,000 in the first year, including the cost of a lawyer, social worker, and clerk. The judges have proposed paying for the office with a new property tax to support senior citizen services. The tax is expected to generate about \$7.8 million this year.

"We're hearing proposals from everybody and their brother" even though the committee still hasn't yet called on service providers to apply for money, said Arvoy, a former Swartz Creek city clerk.

"They probably need an office (of public guardian)," she said. "I just don't know how much we should fund" with the millage.

The new county office proposal is the latest fallout from the Pitcher case.

In December, new guidelines were laid out for legal guardians and conservators, requiring that they document spending from accounts they oversee.

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April 2, 2007

A Budget With a Breakthrough in Child Health Care

By [RICHARD PÉREZ-PEÑA](#)

For two months, the high-volume battle over Gov. [Eliot Spitzer](#)'s cuts to hospitals and nursing homes has obscured a significant piece of his health care plan, a major expansion of state-subsidized health insurance, especially for middle-class children, which sailed with little debate into the state budget approved yesterday.

The Legislature agreed to Mr. Spitzer's plan to set the nation's highest income ceiling for state-financed health care for children, making it, more than ever, a middle-class entitlement. Child Health Plus, the state-subsidized health insurance plan, was created in the early 1990s for the children of low-income families that were not quite poor enough to qualify for Medicaid, but income limits have risen over the years.

New York already allows families with incomes up to 250 percent of the federal poverty line — or \$51,630 for a family of four — to qualify for Child Health Plus by paying a monthly premium of up to \$15 per child, depending on income and family size. The new state budget will raise that to 400 percent — \$82,600 for a family of four — the highest in the country.

That would make most of the 400,000 uninsured children in New York eligible for the program. The budget would also simplify enrollment in Medicaid, to address the fact that almost 1 million New Yorkers are eligible but not covered.

No one knows how many people will actually enroll in the programs as a result of the changes, or precisely how much the expansions will cost.

"These are good steps," but not ambitious enough, said Kenneth E. Raske, president of the Greater New York Hospital Association. "We need to sit down with the governor, roll up our sleeves, and have a serious conversation about how we get to universal."

Health care, by far the biggest part of the state's budget, has posed a competing set of challenges for Mr. Spitzer. He wants to lower the health care costs the state already bears, in particular, reining in the nation's most expensive Medicaid program, at \$47 billion a year. At the same time, he wants to greatly increase the number of people the state covers. Unless he can do the former, he cannot afford the latter.

As a candidate last year, and again as governor, Mr. Spitzer said he could achieve universal health coverage in New York. The state has about 2.7 million uninsured people, and covering all of them would cost about \$4 billion a year, experts say.

From the day, two months ago, when he proposed his budget, the governor and his aides insisted that his call to cut spending was not just about saving money and reining in Medicaid. They said that just as important were their attempts to rearrange the money in ways that would make the system simpler, more sensible and fairer — and less dependent on political deals made with the powerful hospital industry and health workers' union.

The new governor got much of what he wanted on that score, admittedly small steps that he promised were the first among many in a long process he likened to turning a battleship.

“The policy objectives I outlined in January, we met,” Mr. Spitzer said Friday.

The budget includes more than \$900 million of the \$1.3 billion in health care spending cuts he sought. But 1199 United Healthcare Workers East, along with the hospital and nursing home industries, were able to beat back more than half the cuts aimed at them, allowing them to claim victory, too.

“Our hat’s off to the governor and Legislature for enacting some significant health care reforms,” said Jennifer Cunningham, a senior adviser to the union. “But kudos to New Yorkers and the democratic process for making sure that we didn’t achieve these reforms at the expense of our state’s top-notch hospitals, nursing homes and health care workers.”

In proposing his cuts, Mr. Spitzer, a Democrat, seemed to be declaring his independence from the health care workers’ union and the hospital industry, forces often allied with Democrats that had been accustomed to getting their way in Albany.

His plans touched off a public relations war, with the union and the hospitals buying millions of dollars worth of television ads criticizing him, and Mr. Spitzer responding with ads of his own.

Though Mr. Spitzer got somewhat less than half the savings he wanted from hospitals and nursing homes, most of what he got involved the kind of restructuring he said was so important.

The state pays hospitals, through Medicaid and other programs, to train new doctors — but the payments are based mostly on the number of residents the hospitals taught in 1981, even if that number has since declined. Through Medicaid, the state pays hospitals and nursing homes to help recruit and retain workers — but it doles out that money based on their overall payrolls, not how many Medicaid patients they actually have.

Mr. Spitzer tried to eliminate such practices, saying that Medicaid dollars should follow Medicaid patients and teaching dollars should follow students. He got his way on doctor training money and a partial victory on worker recruitment programs, and cut those programs by almost \$150 million a year in the process.

A result is that the budget cuts will hit hospitals very unevenly; some hospitals in poor neighborhoods actually stand to gain money. The precise impacts have not been calculated yet, but an analysis of Mr. Spitzer’s January proposals by the Greater New York Hospital Association found that 15 hospitals — mostly relatively large, financially successful ones in New York City — would bear most of the cuts.

The governor declared last week that lawmakers had “set the budget on a new path,” acknowledging that the path was a long one.

But the amounts of money redistributed — as opposed to simply cut — were relatively small, compared with the overall health budget. When it comes to rethinking how the money is spent, of far more consequence could be the governor’s plan for a top-to-bottom overhaul of what Medicaid pays for each of hundreds of services, from bandaging a cut to removing a cancerous lung.

Mr. Spitzer had proposed more than \$400 million in big, across-the-board cuts to hospitals and nursing homes that were simply about reining in spending, but those were shrunk to about \$82 million. For those industries, the budget also includes a number of

smaller, more targeted cuts and increases.

The governor had more success with broad-based cuts, more than \$372 million, in part by reducing Medicaid payments to pharmacists for prescription drugs, and by freezing the premiums the state pays to insurance companies that enroll Medicaid patients. The state is also counting on \$132 million in savings from improved efforts to fight Medicaid fraud.

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Taxes still on the table, Granholm says

She urges sides to compromise to end stalemate

March 31, 2007

BY CHRIS CHRISTOFF

FREE PRESS LANSING BUREAU CHIEF

LANSING -- Gov. Jennifer Granholm said Friday that she's open to tax increases other than the 2% tax on services she proposed to help resolve the state's budget crisis. But, she said, she won't support any tax that's temporary.

About \$345 million of the budget shortfall, which had recently grown to more than \$1 billion, was erased this week when the state House approved Granholm's executive order for cuts and other savings. But her plan for a 2% tax on services appears dead, after rejection by the Republican-controlled Senate and lack of support among House Democrats.

In a Free Press interview, Granholm acknowledged the public's frustration with the stalemate over the fiscal crisis. She said all sides -- herself, the Democratic-led House and the Senate -- are driven by a love of Michigan.

She said no one wants to raise taxes or slash the budget, and that she and Republicans have different views on how to recharge Michigan's economy.

"We have to arrive at the sensible center," she said. "Nobody is going to get everything they want. I don't think we've been in a situation before where you've got such tough decisions all the way around."

She added, "I don't think anybody expected this was going to be easy."

She said the budget stalemate would break once House Democrats lay out proposals for budget cuts and tax increases in the next two weeks.

Granholm said she is willing to consider options to reduce the cost of health and retirement benefits for teachers, which Republicans are pushing. She said she has told the Michigan Education Association, a staunch political ally, that long-term changes will be considered.

"The MEA knows there will be a request for reform, health care, pension or whatever," Granholm said. "I have taken nothing off the table."

But she said it would be unfair to ask state employees to cut their pay, because they gave up \$295 million in pay concessions in 2004-05. State workers' current labor contract gives them a 10% pay increase spread over 3 years.

School employees' health care and retirement costs have been a growing concern among school districts and the state, which pays 75% of the cost of running schools. The Free Press reported this week that health care and pension costs for school employees statewide consume 18% of school districts' budgets on average and cost taxpayers about \$4 billion a year. Health care costs for Michigan school employees are 42% higher than the national average, according to a 2004 Standard & Poor's study.

Earlier Friday, Granholm said that several tax options are available to raise more revenue. She withheld judgment on a plan by House Speaker Andy Dillon, D-Redford Township, to tax Michigan's two largest electric utility companies, in return for giving them the regulated monopolies they had before 2000.

Dillon said the tax would net the state about \$500 million a year, but gave no details of how it would be imposed or how to prevent utilities from passing the entire cost of the tax to customers.

As for other tax hikes, "constitutionally, you've got several options," Granholm said. "You've got a version of the sales tax on services. You could do two pennies, you could do a narrower number. You've got the income tax as an option. Now, you've got the utilities tax as an option."

She added, "Whatever the fix is, it's got to do the trick once and for all."

Besides the deficit for the fiscal year that ends Sept. 30, the state faces an additional \$2-billion deficit the next fiscal year.

About half of next year's projected deficit would be the result of the Single Business Tax expiration on Dec. 31. Granholm and Republicans have proposed plans to replace all or most of the revenue from the SBT.

Contact **CHRIS CHRISTOFF** at 517-372-8660 or christoff@freepress.com.

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FROM OUR READERS | STATE OF CRISIS

Only teamwork can fix budget

April 1, 2007

Unfair pay cuts

If the people who work for the State of Michigan have to take a pay cut due to the budget crisis, then all the people who work for the State of Michigan should take the same percentage off their salaries. It should not have to be the burden of just a select few.

We at the Department of Human Services are tired of being the only select few who have to make the sacrifices. We should not be the only group to blame for the state budget crisis, and we can't afford to take a pay cut again.

Sandra Scharrer

Taylor

Employees have helped

As reported by the Detroit Free Press, state employees have agreed to contract concessions totaling \$295 million to help resolve the state's budget crisis. However, the employees' total contribution deserves mention. Included in concessions was banked leave time in which employees deferred pay for 100-104 hours they worked -- and higher co-pays for some prescription drugs. State employees also agreed to five furlough days without pay.

In our effort to resolve this crisis we are cutting expenses, striving for efficiencies and continue to look for savings in such areas as pooling health care, reducing travel and imposing hiring freezes. It is important to note that state employment today remains at its lowest level since before 1973. We are grateful for state employees who are continuing to carry on the work of state government with fewer colleagues.

Liz Boyd

Press Secretary to Gov. Jennifer Granholm

Grand Rapids Press

Letters for April 2

Ludicrous analogy

The May 8 article "Black workers claim bias" (Press, March 19) is ludicrous! How could Juanita Glover, an employee and union representative, even dare make such an analogy unless she had first-hand experience that working at the Department of Human Services was "sometimes like being on a plantation."

However, I'll bet that day was never payday. Apparently "plantation" life was good enough for her to stay around for 28 years when she or any of the other complainers had ample opportunity to leave. It seems metaphorically speaking that they were only chained to their paycheck!

JERRY WRIGHT/Wyoming

04/01/2007



Record-Eagle/Patrick Sullivan

Authorities say custodians Benzie County set up a tanning bed inside their building next to the governmental center in Beulah.

Tan janitor keeps job

BY PATRICK SULLIVAN
psullivan@record-eagle.com

BEULAH — A janitor at the county jail gets to keep his job but must serve probation after admitting he stole electricity from Benzie County so he could darken his skin on a tanning bed.

Alan Ernest Blattner, 56, of Frankfort, recently pleaded guilty to misdemeanor embezzlement under \$200, was ordered to pay fines and costs, and must serve probation for one year.

Blattner took electricity from the county to use a tanning bed somehow installed in a county janitors' office from 2004 through 2006, according to the charges. Blattner did not return a message seeking comment.

"It was misdemeanor embezzlement and it was for electricity, so it was pretty much a minor thing," said county Administrator Chuck Clarke on why he and Sheriff Robert Blank decided not to fire Blattner.

Also, Clarke and Ford Stone, the special prosecutor in the case, said Blattner's role in the electricity theft was minor.

The real culprit, they said, was the county's former maintenance supervisor, Donald Zaleski, 55, a Frankfort resident who died in a December car crash that investigators linked to speed and alcohol.

Stone said he doesn't know who owned the tanning bed, but he determined it was not purchased with county funds.

"The custodian offices are located in a separate building," Stone said. "I'm not sure how, but somehow they managed to get the tanning bed into this separate building."

Investigators also found marijuana pipes taken from the sheriff's evidence room and a trace amount of marijuana in the custodians' building, Stone said. Stone said an investigation failed to connect the marijuana and the pipes to any suspects, including Blattner.

Clarke said Blattner was questioned about whether he used the tanning bed while on the clock. He said Blattner maintained he only rarely used the tanning bed on weekends.

Another suspect linked to Zaleski faces a preliminary examination in district court on April 19 for felony theft charges.

Elaine Lucille Saffron, 49, of Interlochen, faces charges of larceny between \$1,000 and \$20,000 and receiving and concealing stolen property between \$1,000 and \$20,000 for the alleged theft of a laptop computer from a state Department of Human Services office, according to court documents.



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House Approves FY 2008 Budget Resolution

On March 29, the House approved a \$2.9 trillion budget fiscal year 2008 resolution on a 216-210 vote, following the lead of the Senate, which passed its version on March 23. The House version includes a deficit-neutral reserve fund of up to \$50 billion for the State Children's Health Insurance Program. It also includes a reserve fund of \$20 billion for agriculture spending, which could include new spending on federal nutrition programs, and reserve funds for Transitional Medical Assistance and for improvements to Medicare Part D. The House resolution rejected cuts in several programs that were proposed in the administration's FY 2008 budget, including those to the Social Services Block Grant, the Child Care Development Block Grant, Low-Income Home Energy Assistance and the Community Development Block Grant. The measure also rejects a proposed cut in the Food Stamp Program that would limit categorical eligibility to only those households receiving cash assistance. The two bodies will convene a conference committee shortly to work out the differences. A summary of the [Senate Appropriations bill is available online](#). More information about the House budget resolution is at <http://budget.house.gov/>.

House, Senate Wrap Up Supplemental Spending Measures

On March 29, the Senate passed a supplemental spending measure for FY 2007. The measure would provide for sufficient funding to eliminate federal funding shortfalls in SCHIP for the remainder of FY 2007. It also includes language prohibiting the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services from implementing the Medicaid public provider rule (CMS-2258-P) for two years and limits to Medicaid graduate medical education. During floor debate, Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) attempted to strip the public provider language from the bill because of concerns that it would limit CMS' ability to protect the integrity of the program. A vote was not taken on the amendment he offered. The bill also includes \$730 million for LIHEAP. The House passed its version of the supplemental measure last week, and these issues will have to be resolved in a conference committee meeting on the two different versions of the bill.

House Panel Focuses on Dental Care in SCHIP

On March 27, the House Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee held a hearing on children's dental care as part of the ongoing series of hearings related to reauthorization of SCHIP. Panelist Ray Scheppach, executive director of the National Governors Association, discussed states' progress in improving access to dental services for SCHIP enrollees. Scheppach said benefit mandates, or any other attempt to make SCHIP more like Medicaid, could erode the improvements made so far and pose a potential obstacle to state efforts to expand affordable coverage options. Among the recommendations made by the panelists were to expand dental care in SCHIP; allow states to provide wrap-around coverage for dental services; reduce paperwork requirements; and develop reporting and quality measures to evaluate the program. Kathleen Roth, president of the American Dental Association, cited states that had developed successful models for providing dental services, including Alabama, Tennessee, and Michigan. [Testimony from the panelists can be found online](#).

Senators, Congressmen Offers Solutions for Newborns and Medicaid

Earlier this month, Grassley, Rep. Jose Serrano (D-N.Y.), and Rep. Gene Green (D-Texas) all introduced different versions of legislation making technical corrections to the Medicaid citizenship documentation requirements for eligibility for newborns contained in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005. All versions seek to address the problem created by the DRA of "erroneously inhibiting" access to Medicaid. The bill numbers are S. 751, H.R. 210, and H.R. 1238, respectively.

Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.) has also introduced a comprehensive measure, S. 909, that would make citizenship verification a state option. Specifically, states would be permitted to determine when and to what extent citizenship verification is required of U.S. citizens. States would also be permitted to utilize the standards most appropriate to their population as long as such standards were no more stringent than those currently used by the Social Security Administration and include Native American tribal documents when appropriate. The legislation also seeks to ensure that individuals are afforded sufficient time to provide citizenship documentation utilizing the same reasonable time period standard that is available to legal immigrants to provide satisfactory evidence of their immigration status; protect children who are U.S. citizens by virtue of being born in the United States from being denied coverage after birth because of citizenship verification requirements; clarify ambiguities in federal law to ensure that these citizen children, regardless of the immigration status of their parents, are deemed eligible to receive Medicaid services for one year; and ensure that the thousands of citizen children and adults who were erroneously denied Medicaid because of citizenship verification requirements may receive retroactive Medicaid eligibility for the coverage they were inappropriately denied. [The bills' text is available online](#).

Study Suggest Links between Child Care and School-Age Behavior Problems

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development has released the most recent findings of its national, longitudinal study of child care, the Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development. The study tracks a sample of 1,364 children drawn randomly from 10 locations throughout the country from birth through age 15. The sample is not nationally representative. Researchers measured the quality,

quantity, and type of child care children received from birth through 54 months. In the study, published in the March/April 2007 issue of Child Development, NICHD researchers cite results that show that the more time children spent in center-based care before kindergarten, the more likely their sixth-grade teachers were to report that they engaged in problem behaviors such as fighting, disobedience, and arguing. In this most recent finding, study researchers were evaluating whether developmental characteristics study children demonstrated between kindergarten and third grade were still present in the fifth and sixth grades. Recent findings also showed that children who experienced higher quality child care before kindergarten scored higher on vocabulary assessments in the fifth grade than children who received lower quality care. [Measures of child-care quality and other information on the study are available online.](#)

GAO Reports on Food Stamp Categorical Eligibility Option

On March 28, the Government Accountability Office released a report, Food Stamp Program: FNS Could Improve Guidance and Monitoring to Help Ensure Appropriate Use of Noncash Categorical Eligibility. At the request of the Senate Agriculture Committee, GAO surveyed all states to determine the extent to which they used the FSP's categorical eligibility option, under which states may replace the FSP's normal resource limit with that used in the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. The administration has proposed to restrict categorical eligibility to only those households receiving TANF cash benefits. GAO found that the 29 states that confer TANF noncash categorical eligibility use a variety of noncash services to qualify participants for FSP benefits under the option, including services that provide employment support, family support, and self-sufficiency support. Some states use brochures or information referral services that could allow for a large segment of the state's FSP population to be categorically eligible, while some states use services designed to serve more narrowly defined populations. GAO said that six states "may not be following program regulations" that require them to use certain federally or state-funded noncash services to confer categorical eligibility. GAO also said that some states reported that they do not specifically determine if an individual needs a certain TANF noncash service before conferring FSP eligibility.

GAO added that TANF noncash categorically eligible FSP households appear to have slightly higher incomes as compared with those of TANF cash categorically eligible households. GAO noted that the vast majority of TANF noncash households may remain eligible for food stamps without TANF noncash categorical eligibility because their income and/or asset levels are within the regular food stamp limits. Other households may lose eligibility for food stamps because their income and/or asset levels are too high. GAO reported that many state FSP officials believed that eliminating noncash categorical eligibility would decrease participation in food stamps and other nutrition programs. Many of the officials also believed that the proposed elimination of noncash categorical eligibility would increase the FSP's administrative workload and state administrative costs.

GAO recommended that, to improve management and administration of TANF noncash categorical eligibility, the Food and Nutrition Service should provide guidance and technical assistance to states clarifying which TANF noncash services states must use to confer categorical eligibility for food stamps and monitor states' compliance with the categorical eligibility requirements. [The report, GAO-07-465, is available online.](#)

ACF Publishes LIHEAP 2008 State Median Income Estimates

On March 28, the Administration for Children and Families published the 2008 state median income estimates for use under the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. The estimates are effective as of March 28, 2007, although implementation can be deferred until October 1, 2007, or the beginning of the grantee's fiscal year (whichever is later). The range provides LIHEAP grantees with the flexibility to implement the eligibility criteria between high energy-use seasons. The methodology was revised, decreasing state median income estimates by an average of 0.8 percent when compared to the previous methodology. The estimates were published in the March 28 Federal Register (72 FR 14579-14581) and are available at the [Federal Register website.](#)



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

Contact: Maureen Sorbet or Karen Stock (517) 373-7394

Governor declares April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month

April 2, 2007

LANSING – Governor Jennifer M. Granholm has proclaimed April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month in Michigan, urging people to learn more about the impact of sexual assault on survivors, friends, family and all of society.

“Sexual assault is a devastating attack on a person’s body and soul,” said Marianne Udow, Department of Human Services director. “Sexual assault is more pervasive than many realize.”

Recent studies show 40 percent of Michigan women age 18 and older have experienced some form of sexual violence. Nationwide, a person is raped every two and a half minutes.

During April, the Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board Executive Director Debi Cain urges people to talk about sexual assault and its impacts. Talking openly about the crime helps raise awareness about the issue, helps survivors feel less alone and conveys the message that help and support are available.

“It’s not about sex,” Cain said. “It’s about the perpetrator gaining power and control over another person. While the majority of sexual assault victims are female, it can happen to anyone regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, race, ability or economic status.”

The Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board, whose members are appointed by the governor, is housed within DHS. The board provides support and grant funding for local sexual assault services agencies that will be hosting individual events through the state to commemorate Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

For more information about the Michigan Domestic Violence Treatment and Prevention Board, go to www.michigan.gov/domesticviolence